MUSICAL EXAMS.

Statements on behalf of the Associated Board.

A Letter From Dr. Samuel Aitken—The Board Declared Not a Money-making Concern.

To the Editor of the Globe : I think it will be generally admitted that only one side of this question has been heard up to the present.

Columns of abuse and misrepresentation have been freely scattered about. The time has come to speak out and to speak plainly.

(1) I have come from England to Canada to put this matter fairly and squarely before the Canadian public. I have come to tell the truth, and, if possible, to make other people tell the truth.

(2) The Associated Board is not a money-making concern, nor is it a dividend-distributing body. The board has never visited any colony yet, except by invitation. In the case of Canada, that invitation was freely given for years past by the Canadian profession, and notably by gentlemen who are principals or proprietors (or those who represent them) of the trading institutions known as the Dominion College of Montreal, the Toronto College of Music and the Toronto Conservatory of Music.

(3) Some of these gentlemen, for reasons best known to themselves, have altered their minds. That they have a perfect right to do, but they have no right to misrepresent the work and the motives of the Associated Board. No device has been too mean, no untruth too gross and no statement too spiteful to be made. It has been all along a pitiful display of interested prejudice and passion, where calm and sober judgment should have reigned.

This action and the coarse personalities indulged in have precluded all hope of further approach in this direction.

(4) I, therefore, appeal to the general Canadian public, and with them shall rest the decision as to whether we continue our examinations in Canada or otherwise. The board has no desire, nor has it any intention, of forcing its examinations upon any colony. It offers them in good faith because a true work can be done. Parents and others can know by its examinations what they have a right to know, whether they are getting value received for the fees which are paid for musical instruction. The board declines altogether to accept the change of mind of these prejudiced professors as the mind of Canada.

(5) The object of the Associated Board is to find out and to encourage good teaching, and also to find out and to ruthlessly expose that which is bad and inefficient. I am told by those who have lived amongst you for years and who are now living amongst you that, with a few honorable exceptions, there is no teaching in Canada worthy of the name. I can well believe it. When I see that students can get letters to their names without being required to play a study or even a scale in thirds or sixths—when they can substitute pieces of a lower grade for those of the highest examinations (on the principle, I suppose, that two commoners make one lord and two lords make one duke)—and when they can be passed at the low grade of 50 out of 100 marks ; then I can believe anything. Our board requires 66 out of 99 for its lowest pass and 75 out of 100 in the teachers' examination. I am informed that in some institutions teachers examine their own pupils and make their own awards, and that the protests of honest outsiders for a more stringent examination are overruled and ignored. A distinguished musician told me only a day or two ago that he was certain 60 per cent. of the present teachers in Canada could not pass our senior centre examination. I have correspondence which also confirms this. I hope our teachers' examination will be largely availed of this year, especially as the fees have been made less onerous than heretofore.

(6) The professional and expert members of the Associated Board who have prepared and carefully revised its syllabus are Sir Alexander C. Mackenzie, Sir Hubert Parry, Sir Walter Parratt, Prof. Stanford, Mr. Watter Macfarren, Mr. Alberto Randegger and Mr. Franklin Taylor. If these men do not know what is required in an examination, whether for teachers or otherwise, then such knowledge does not exist in the world.

(7) Now what is the reason of all this opposition to the Associated Board ? I have no hesitation in saying that it resolves itself into two reasons : First, the fear of the loss of a few dollars to these trading and dividend-paying concerns, and second, the fear of bad teaching being exposed. I regard the opposition as altogether insincere, and the methods which have been used in exploiting it as neither honest nor creditable.

(8) I have heard of a document called the protest. I do not know whether to regard this as a piece of crass stupidity or as a piece of wilful wickedness. I learn that persons whose names appear thereon know nothing of the merits of the questions involved. I have also indubitable testimony that persons appearing as signatories thereto have neither signed nor countenanced the protest. I challenge Mr. Church to show me these signatures at once. I will make it my business to test their accuracy, and, if necessary, will call upon every one whose name appears therein to see whether they have understood the question at issue. I should say that the sooner this precious protest is consigned to the limbo of forgotten and dishonored memories the better.

(9) The Associated Board, as I have previously said, is not a money-making concern. In the R.A.M. and R.C.M. the pupils' fees in no single case cover the cost of their musical education. If that were all the two institutions had to depend upon the shutters would have to be put up at once. Contrast this with the two Toronto institutions. I am told that the director of one institution owns more than half the stock. It is therefore clearly a case of exploiting his own musical concern. I happen to know that the principal of the other wants at the present moment to find an English syndicate to buy "his college," and has fixed the purchase price at £10,000. It is quite time, I think, that a little daylight was let into the proceedings of both these institutions.

(10) I notice the report of last week's meeting in the Toronto papers ; it is amusing to observe that the resolution which was proposed and carried was one that was advocated just nineteen years ago ! Well, whatever the Associated Board has done or may do, it has proved that Canada wants something which does not at pretent exist. I sincerely hope the university will take up this matter.

(11) I am pleased to say that since I was here last year, I have been enabled to get established the first colonial scholarship in connection with our examinations. This has been done by the University of the Cape of Good Hope, and we have accepted it (on my own proposal) instead of an annual payment of money for the trouble and expense of arranging our examinations there, which we have conducted for the last six or seven years without any consideration whatever. I again assert that every penny of profit which may be made out of these examinations in Canada shall be devoted to the formation of scholarships. I do not ask the profession to believe it, but I hope that all fair-minded Canadians will.

(12) A prominent Canadian musician writes (January 24, 1899) as follows :—"The fact is there is no practical examination in Canada (except that of the Associated Board) which is entirely unprejudiced and beyond the possibility of suspicion." That is the opinion of one of yourselves.

(13) I therefore appeal to all lovers of fair play, to all scholastic establishments, convents and teachers, to use our national system of examination, and "to free themselves from the irksome thraldom and domination of institutions which are mostly concerned in money-making." (these are not my words), and which are thereby hindering the progress of musical art in this colony.

(14) It may interest many to know that the Dominion College of Montreal now looks upon us with friendly eyes. Mr. Illsley, with whom I spent a day last week, has promised me to call together his committee to see whether they cannot in future make use of our examinations.

(15) I am happy to say that at home we have received this year a record entry, and I was very pleased a few days ago to know that even some Italian families hearing one or two of our candidates play and sing in Italy have resolved in future to let their own children prepare the annual tests imposed by the Associated Board. I have sent them our syllabus and music.

(16) I am very happy to say that his Excellency the Governor-General, whom I saw last week, and to whom I fully explained the position of affairs, has kindly consented to become the President of our Canadian council.

SAMUEL AITKEN,
Honorary Secretary.

P.S.—I shall be staying at the Queen's Hotel for a few days. Very happy to see anyone, professional or otherwise, who is interested in this subject.

Toronto, Feb. 28.